An Ecofeminist Analysis of Environmentally Sensitive Women Using Qualitative Methodology: The Emancipatory Potential of an Ecological Life

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Using depth interviews and observations, the authors empirically examine market activities of women who care deeply about nature. Interpreted in the light of ecofeminist theory, the data suggest that these women are forging an ecological self that affects their view of consumption and the marketplace. Leading ecological lives, the women challenge traditional notions of feminine consumption and are a force for change in their relationships with family, friends, the workplace, and the community. These data dispute conventional notions of environmentalism and green consumption; they support and extend an ecofeminist notion of the ecological self as a nondominating path of change. The authors outline implications for relevant stakeholders.

> "Consume less" may become the final frontier of the consumer-rebel, the consumer who does not merely seek living space within the present system or use the products of the system to express disaffection and protest, but decides that "enough is enough," that anything less than a frontal assault on the core assumption of consumerism is inadequate.
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> —Gabriel and Lang 1995, p. 149

The goal of this article is to explore a group of women who protest consumerist society by consuming less to affirm their relationship to the earth. Within consumer research, interest in consumer rebellion is growing. Since Peñaloza and Price (1993) first presented their general typology of consumer resistance, researchers have examined consumer resistance to marketing (Dobscha 1997; Ritson and Dobscha 1998), advertising (Elliott and Ritson 1997), technology (Mick and Fournier 1998), and fashion (Thompson and Haytko 1997). These studies primarily view consumers' resistance as acts of defiance and reappropriations of control from a marketplace that is not designed for these particular consumers (de Certeau 1984). In general, researchers conclude that these defiant consumers can be brought back into the fold of the marketplace if their needs are truly met.

The women in this study affirm their relationship to the natural environment within the marketplace. Meeting the needs of these women, unlike those of other resistors, would require radical changes in the marketplace. The green marketing literature, however, emphasizes a managerial perspective on the relationship between consumers and the environment (e.g., Scherhorn 1993; Schwepker and Cornwell 1991) and primarily studies this relationship from a logical empiricist paradigm (e.g., Aaker and Bagozzi 1982; Shrum, McCarty, and Lowrey 1995; Zikmund and Stanton 1971). This approach holds that green consumers can meet their needs in the current marketplace. Kilbourne and Beckman (1998, p. 524) suggest that such an approach has yielded "marginal progress after twenty-five years" and call for a new paradigm.

This article breaks from traditional research and uses a feminist approach to examine the role of consumption in the lives of people who deeply regard nature. In particular, we use the ecofeminist paradigm to investigate the emancipatory potential of affirming one's relationship to nature and the impact this relationship has on consumption. We first explore the philosophical connection between women and nature to better understand how this link influences behavior, both inside and outside the marketplace. Next, we examine a group of women who care deeply about nature, and we trace the impact of this relationship on their sense of self and social connections. Finally, we outline implications for four major stakeholders: regulators, environmental action groups, consumers, and marketers.

Although we acknowledge that race, class, and nationality are strong mediators of the human–nature link (Bryant and Mohai 1992; Bullard 1990; Krauss 1993), for practical reasons, we chose to limit our study to white women even though other groups warrant attention. Similarly, although men's relationship to nature is certainly of interest, women are often found at the forefront of environmental movements. Many different groups of women are protesting the environmental degradation that is endemic in their everyday lives: rural Himalayan women successfully challenging a multinational corporation (i.e., the Chipko tree-hugging movement), Micronesian women fighting against atmospheric nuclear weapons testing, English women protesting in Greenham Common against storing nuclear missiles, Native American women researching toxicity in their breast milk from local produce, and rural Kenyan women planting millions of trees to conserve soil and water, to name but a few examples (Krauss 1993; Merchant 1992). Some

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researchers suggest that, in part, women engage in local activism because women and children are "ecological markers" and show signs of disease first (i.e., children because of their low body weight and women because their bodies are unhealthy environments for their unborn infants). Women are also the primary organizers and maintainers of households, and therefore they may be more likely to see the detrimental effects of pollution and toxic materials on the health of their families (Gibbs 1982; Pettus 1997). Moreover, women still perform the vast majority of household shopping (Yankelovich Marketing Research Group 1993) and are arguably the decision makers with great potential for impact in the marketplace.

We initially chose to explore women's connection to nature to discern how this link influences their product choices, consumption, and disposal. Yet as the study progressed, we broadened the focus to explore this connection as it exists throughout the women's daily lives, in which consumption plays a modest, yet complicated role. Ecofeminism, which we discuss next, offers a theoretical framework from which to view the women's everyday activities. We then describe the feminist methodology employed in this study. Finally, we organize the substantive findings into three sections, which present the women's relationship to nature, their marketplace behaviors, and the changes that arise in the women and their communities because of their connection to nature. In conclusion, we discuss implications for four relevant stakeholders.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, first described by d'Eaubonne in 1974, encompasses the work of academics and activists and includes researchers working in fields as diverse as philosophy, politics, history, and literary analysis (Warren 1990). Just as no single version of feminism exists (Bristor and Fischer 1993), no single authoritative approach to ecofeminism can be found, and at times, the differences among various ecofeminists are vast (Lahar 1991; Merchant 1992; Warren 1987). Nevertheless, most ecofeminists still agree with the thesis of the germinal work of Rosemary Ruether (1975), who suggested that the social structures that dominate women are the same structures that dominate nature. Therefore, women should align themselves with nature to transform a system that devalues and potentially harms them both.

The ecofeminist paradigm stands at the intersection of feminist and ecological thought. Feminists first argued that patriarchal hierarchies, which were implicated in the oppression of women, also played a role in the domination of nature. Whereas feminists first used the analysis of philosophical dualism to understand oppression, ecofeminists have used these same analyses of oppression to understand the domination of nature. Stated briefly, philosophical dualism is when differences, such as the differences between masculine and feminine, are treated as a hierarchy and one side of the dualism is valued over the other side (e.g., masculine traits are valued over feminine traits). Sets of these dualisms form ideological systems that are interconnected (e.g., men/culture/public), reinforcing domains that are valued over the underside of the dualisms (e.g., women/nature/private). But most important, these interconnected hierarchies shape social practices. Ecofeminist theorists believe that this logic of domination is used to devalue both women and nature (for an analysis of the logic of domination, see Plumwood 1993, Warren 1990).

Beyond this basic position, ecofeminists diverge (for a collection of positions, see Diamond and Orenstein 1990). For example, historical examinations trace the roots of philosophical dualism to Greek philosophy (Plumwood 1993) and the ascension of Baconian science (Merchant 1980) and argue that a causal link exists between dualistic thinking and the exploitation of women and nature (Spretnak 1990; Warren 1990). Sociolinguistic work investigates the way that language structures relationships between women and nature (Roach 1991). Ethical approaches seek to develop different ethical bases for practices that affect both women and nature (Warren and Cheney 1991).

Moreover, the theoretical positions in ecofeminism mirror those found in feminism (Bristor and Fischer 1993; Jaggar 1983; Merchant 1992; Warren 1987). For example, liberal ecofeminists seek to work within the existing social order to make laws and practices more environmentally friendly (e.g., the legal protection of endangered animals). Cultural ecofeminists suggest that women are different from men both biologically and socially. However, problems arise when the feminine and nature are devalued. They seek to celebrate women and nature and highlight issues such as the influence of environmental degradation on women's reproductive systems (Merchant 1992). More radical forms of ecofeminism attack both of these approaches because they both shore up the status quo and leave the dualistic structures in place (i.e., privileging the feminine over the masculine is still oppressive). Radical ecofeminists seek to dismantle the patriarchal systems that subjugate both women and nature (Daly 1978). Finally, Third World ecofeminists focus on how the global economic shifts influence the everyday lives of indigenous women (Shiva 1989).

Ecofeminism is just one of many environmental discourses—such as ecology, reform environmentalism, and deep ecology—that differ in their basic assumptions and their substantive emphases. For example, the works of Thoreau, Emerson, Marsh, and Muir sparked the first ecology movement in modern Western society (Shrivastava 1994). These writers were naturalists who viewed the conception of the human community as anthropocentric and argued that preserving nature was essential for preserving human community. Ecology then arose as a branch of biology that dealt with the interdependence of organisms and made central the "whole systems" ideology.

Reform environmentalism shifted the focus toward industrialism and the pollution created by the widespread use of chemicals and pesticides (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This discourse was fueled by Rachel Carson's influential study of environmental pollution and forced policymakers to enact new environmental regulations (Carson 1962). Deep ecology developed in opposition to these mainstream environmental movements. Deep ecologists reject anthropocentrism, the idea that nature exists strictly for human welfare, and espouse the idea of ecological egalitarianism. Nature is assumed to have the same rights to exist and flourish as humans have (Ehrenfeld 1978; Naess 1987).

Ecofeminists build on this critique of anthropocentrism and emphasize the interdependency of the social and natural worlds. Ecofeminists differ from deep ecologists by critiquing the concept of "vital human needs" as possibly being justified by the values of patriarchal culture. Ecofeminists seek nondominating relationships among all living things. Nature exists not as an abstract concept but rather in the everyday lived experiences of every human.

McDonagh and Prothero (1997) first delineated ecofeminism within marketing and suggested that it had important implications for marketing practices. Although many versions of ecofeminism exist, our approach most closely aligns with critical ecofeminists such as Warren (1990) and Plumwood (1993). To date, no empirical research in marketing or ecofeminism examines whether nondominating relationships to nature specifically lead to different marketplace behaviors. We examined the relationship between a group of women, who care deeply about nature, and their marketplace behaviors. After describing the methodology, we articulate the informants' relationship to nature and then explore how this relationship affects their consumption and life more broadly.

Methodology

Because the goal of this research is to understand certain women's lives and personal relationships to the natural environment (DeVault 1991; Sherwin 1992; Smith 1987), we used a feminist methodology. Across two phases of data collection, we used three qualitative methods: (1) participant observation, (2) multiple interviewee-guided interviews, and (3) autoelicitation using photographs (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Heisley and Levy 1991).

Feminist researchers employ many of the same data-gathering techniques as are used in positivistic and interpretive paradigms. However, these techniques are embedded in a feminist paradigm, and therefore the data-gathering techniques change. Moreover, whereas the goal of the interpretive paradigm is to seek understanding (Hudson and Ozanne 1988), for the feminist, understanding is the penultimate goal; the ultimate goal is social change guided by theory (i.e., praxis). As Reinharz (1992, p. 240) states, "Feminism is a perspective, not a method.... Feminist research aims to create social change, represent human diversity, includes the researcher as person, and attempts to develop special relations with the people studied."

In addition to different goals, these approaches make different assumptions. For example, like all researchers, feminists worry about the quality of their data; however, feminists assume that data quality often improves when the research relationship improves and when the voices of the informants are used throughout the research process. Therefore, consistent with feminism, we attempted to hear and preserve the participants' voices during all stages of data collection and analysis (Bristor and Fischer 1993; Hudson and Ozanne 1988), minimize power relations between researcher and participant (Hirschman 1993), and build trust through multiple interviews and the free exchange of information (Oakley 1981). The details of this approach follow.

The first phase of the data collection consisted of the first author conducting a participant observation of a local environmental action group. This experience provided a crucial understanding of local environmental issues and access to a network of environmentalists. We learned the group's language and the local threats members encountered, and we met the people who were most willing to vocalize their strong connection to the environment. Over a yearlong period, field notes were taken at eight different meetings. The size of the meetings averaged approximately 50 people; the participants were white, the vast majority were women, and their ages ranged from 30 to 70 years of age. Initial contact was made with several of the women who eventually participated in this study (see Table 1).

During the second phase of the data collection process, we conducted interviewee-guided interviews, observations, and autoelicitation with nine women. Feminist researchers often rely on open-ended interviews, because this approach gives the participants the power to structure their feelings and thoughts (Reinharz 1992). Giving participants control in the interview is consistent with the feminist goal of attempting to minimize power imbalances between researchers and participants (Hirschman 1993). In addition, interviews were usually conducted in the women's homes, where they might feel most at ease. Conducting three separate interviews with each woman had a range of benefits: Initial themes were explored at greater length, additional data were collected, feedback from the participants was received, and misunderstandings were corrected. Three interviews gave more opportunity for rapport to develop within the research relationship. In some cases, this increased intimacy led to a level of confidence in which personal and private information was shared. Some feminists suggest that the quality and depth of data improve when trust and intimacy exist between the researcher and the informant (Oakley 1981; Reinharz 1992). Although the informants were assured of confidentiality and told the purpose of the study, no tangible incentives were given for participation. Participants were allowed full access to the notes, recorded interviews, and results.

Identification of respondents began with a yearlong participant observation of a local environmental action group. The principal researcher gained access to several women who served on the board of this group, and in turn they provided the researcher with names of other women in the community who were involved in other environmental groups. Women were chosen solely if during initial contact they stated that their relationship to nature was important to them. All of the women were involved with the environment through their jobs and/or participation in voluntary organizations.

As recommended by McCracken (1988), "grand tour" questions were created to introduce the broad topic of the study to the participants. Examples of these grand tour questions are, "What is your relationship to the environment?" "What are your thoughts about the environment?" and "When did you start feeling/thinking this way?" These questions guided the first interview. The analysis of the text from the first interview served as a guide to the second interview, and emergent themes from the first interaction were clarified and validated. The third interview then served as an informal conversation in which issues from the second interview were explored and any other topics deemed important or interesting by the participant were attended to

Table 1. Profiles of Women in Study

Name	Demographic Information	Affiliation
Robin	White, late 30s, married Currently working in the home Two young children College degree in environmental engineering	Member, national women's association Coordinator, joint meeting of national women's organization and local environmental group
Laura	White, mid-40s, married Works for local natural history museum No children College degree in natural science	Board member, local environmental group Volunteer, local bird-watching club Volunteer, stream-watching club
Terry	White, early 40s, married Works for regional recycling co-op Two adult children not living at home High school degree	Founder and coordinator, recycling co-op
Ann	White, early 50s, single Works as researcher at university Two adult children not living at home College degree	Member and former president, national environmental organization Member, local environmental group
Helen	White, early 70s, married Several adult children not living at home College degree in biology	Member, local bird-watching club Contributor, newsletter for children with disabilities
Margaret	White, late 60s, divorced Works at book publishing company Several adult children not living at home College degree	Former member, national environmental organization
Rachel	White, mid-30s, married Works as organic farmer and cook for vegetarian restaurant College degree	Grows and sells organic produce at local farmer's market
Cathy	White, early 50s, divorced Works at a research clearinghouse Two adult children not living at home College degree	Member, national environmental organization Member, local environmental group Member, Bahai Faith
Dana	White, mid-20s, married Works as coordinator for recycling center Two young children College degree	Coordinator and educator, county recycling center Member, local environmental group

in depth. The women's comments on the transcripts were incorporated into the final analysis.

The women were encouraged to tell their stories in any manner they chose, and questions of elaboration or clarification were asked. No attempt was made to stop digressions (i.e., when women seemed to go off the topic), and these digressions often yielded valuable information in light of later analyses.

Finally, autodriving was employed, in which photographs were used as projective stimuli during the interview (Heisley and Levy 1991). Participants or the researcher photographed areas in the women's homes or possessions that were related to their environmental concerns. Typically, photographs were taken during the second interview and then discussed during the third interview.

Each woman was interviewed three times for one to three hours. Each interview was taped on a hand-held cassette recorder and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken after each interview to record the researcher's observations that were not captured in the interviews. A total of 38 hours of interview data was transcribed into 715 pages of text. In addition, more than 50 pages of field notes were also taken, transcribed, and included in the data analysis.

We analyzed the data using a hermeneutical and feminist method. First, we created a text around each participant. During this first stage of analysis, each woman was considered an individual, and the analysis was driven by her words. Second, we analyzed the data as a whole. The goal at this stage was to make connections among the women and create an interpretation that transcended the individual women's stories without losing the women's voices. The

interpretation is an amalgam of the data. In the analysis, we attempt to maintain the voices of the participants while creating a new, integrative text that is more illuminating than the nine separate voices.

Emergent Themes and Interpretations

Prior green marketing research has focused on determining the characteristics of the socially conscious consumer (e.g., Anderson and Cunningham 1972); assessing consumers' perceptions of business (e.g., Scherhorn 1993); and measuring the influence of perception, attitudes, and incentives on green consumption (e.g., McCarty and Shrum 1994). Guided by logical empiricist methods, this research is generally based on three assumptions: (1) Green consumers use primarily rational decision processes to make product choices (e.g., Ellen 1994), (2) consumers are generally homogeneous in their response to environmental-based product claims depending on their socioeconomic status or race (e.g., Shrum, McCarty, and Lowrey 1995), and (3) consumers' product choices can be understood in isolation from the rest of their daily lives (e.g., Granzin and Olsen 1991).

Our study follows Fisk's (1973) notion that consumption contributes to rather than solves the problem of environmental degradation (Kilbourne 1995; Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997; McDonagh and Prothero 1997; Thogerson and Grunert-Beckman 1996). Our study suggests a vision of the environmental consumer that resonates with Fisk's conjecture. The breadth and depth of the women's green living indeed affected their action within the marketplace. Nevertheless, green living does not center on green consuming—instead, the women seek to live outside the marketplace and reluctantly enter the marketplace only when other nonmarket options are exhausted. These consumers live, shop, and buy on the basis of a complex and strong relationship to nature, a relationship that leads them to question the problem-solving ability of the marketplace.

The oppositional nature of the women's relationship to the market acts as a relief against which we explore the ecological self. We investigate how the ecological self is maintained within the ecological life that the women create for themselves and their families. Then, we discuss how the ecological life stands as a force for change in public and private domains.

The Ecological Self

"I Am Not a Consumer"

The women refuse to be defined as consumers, and therefore we respectfully no longer refer to them as consumers. Consistent with its original meaning, "consuming" is viewed as using up, squandering, and wasting (Gabriel and Lang 1995). In the following passage, Terry makes the point that defining people as consumers amplifies environmental problems:

> So consumerism, whether it's green, purple, brown, or yellow, I think is an issue that needs to be confronted, rather than simply repainted. And I think, I define, obviously when you buy something and you use it, you have consumed. But I think the concept of humans as consumers, or Americans in any case as consumers, is something that needs to be dismantled. We are not consumers. We should not be consumers. We should use things when we need to use them, but we should question much more what exactly it is we need to use, and I think we need to get out of the consumer "buy more, buy more" mindset.

The women's stances on consumption are also consistent with previous definitions of consumption as a disease that causes suffering and devours the body earth. Most of the women were disgusted by uncontrolled development that "devastated" the land (Ann) and "tore up" local habitats (Helen). The dominant consumer culture that encourages acquisition, use, and disposal is in opposition to the women's views, because this behavior translates into environmental degradation. This metaphor of consumption as a disease had a powerful orienting force on the women as they negotiated the marketplace (Zaltman, LeMasters, and Heffring 1982).

The women do not see themselves or their friends as consumers; they are conservers:

> They [friends] are not consumers.... I mean, I could go through my cupboards and tell you, this bottle of this lasted me two years. And this has lasted me six months and will last me more. Things that I used to use, the more I learn and the more I think about, I think, well, I don't really need this. (Laura)

The women create alternative visions of themselves as conservers and attempt to protect the local habitat that supports them by casting aside the material clutter in their lives.

An Interconnected Nonhierarchical Relationship

The women view humans and the natural world as part of one system, each part relying on the other part for support. As Margaret says, "You sort of feel like you are one with nature. You're a part of an ongoing life." Humans and nature are interdependent—their fates are entangled. Therefore, dualistic ideas, such as culture/nature or human/nature, in which one part of this system dominates another part, are inconsistent with these women's views:

> Well, my relationship with nature is that I am part of it. I don't see any separation between what we call the natural environment and human beings except we human beings have built on it.... There is unity throughout the entire creation and nothing exists separately from the whole.... So I never ever thought any other way; I've never understood the idea that humans have dominion over nature. (Cathy)

Similar to the river guides in Arnould and Price's (1993) study, the women commune with nature and believe that their physical and emotional well-being are tied to nature:

> But I did notice a kind of a lift when the sun came out. When I spend time outdoors, I always feel a lot different than when I spend a lot of time indoors. Sleep outside or spend a lot of time, a whole day, outside. It's a really different feeling than when you live in the house. (Robin)

Moreover, nature and culture are intertwined, and the experience of nature often takes place as a cultural activity (Arnould and Price 1993). Many of the women engage in bird-watching expeditions in which they take members of the local community to look at birds in their natural habitats. These outings are educational in scope and social in purpose.

Nature as Separate and Heterogeneous

Although the women view themselves as interconnected, they also respect nature as a separate entity that does not merely exist for the needs and pleasures of the women (this

view is in opposition to the anthropocentric assumptions made by deep ecologists):

> That time in the woods really opened my mind to some things that I hadn't really been aware, and really basically, it was just really feeling like I needed to learn to be a lot more gentle in my relationship to the earth and much more conscious about what I do with my garbage and what I spent my money on. Just how I lived, how I walked, even how I walked in the woods. *Where I put my feet.* I mean it is just everything. Affect every aspect, and I felt such a strong connection to the earth at that point. And it has never really left me since that time. (Rachel)

The women recognize that just as nature does not exist to serve them, human ends and natural ends are not equivalent. Hurricanes, tornadoes, mudslides, and El Niño all occur despite the culturally dominant belief that nature can be controlled for the good of society. The ecological self incorporates this element in the form of reverence or deference to the unruly and unpredictable natural world (Arnould and Price 1993).

Nature is not viewed as monolithic. Quite to the contrary, nature is seen as diverse. Margaret notes the rich diversity of nature as well as the different accompanying problems:

> In some ways the desert is more fragile than the coast or glades. Although I don't know if there is anything more fragile than the glades. And then we hiked and traveled in the Rockies, the Canadian Rockies, and that's a different kind of fragile environment. So you just become aware that different environments have different problems.

Omnipresent and Multifaceted

All the women spoke in varying degrees about how the natural world is ubiquitous in decisions as mundane as "what I do with my garbage" and as important as delivering babies and worshipping. Moreover, their relationship to nature is one of the most central relationships in their lives. Cathy finds herself in awe of nature and sees nature as a "miracle to me. I mean, I just revere it. I think it's absolutely wonderful."

At first it is tempting to view nature as part of the women's extended self (Belk 1988). The concept of the extended self maintains that possessions act as a reflection of a person's identity. In this case, nature cannot be considered part of the women's extended self, because the women believe that nature cannot be possessed and that nature serves its own ends that do not equate to human goals. Furthermore, as is clear in the next section, the women maintain the ecological self by minimizing their relationship to goods, in contrast with Belk's notion of the extended self as being maintained by goods.

In summary, these women define the self as a "self-in-relationship," which is consistent with Plumwood's (1993, p. 154) theoretical conjecture that a mutual or relational self underlies the ecological self and influences relationships to other living organisms:

> The ecological self can be viewed as a type of relational self, one which includes the goal of the flourishing of earth others and the earth community among its own primary ends, and hence respects or cares for these others for their own sake. Concepts of care, solidarity and friendship present alternatives to the instrumental mode within existing liberal societies.

The women care deeply about nature and view themselves as conservers of nature. However, they neither overly separate themselves from nature (i.e., the logic of domination) nor consider themselves in total continuity with nature. Hypercontinuity contains its own pitfalls. People who perceive no separation between themselves and nature may inaccurately perceive that their needs and nature's needs are one and the same (Plumwood 1993). The women operate toward nature as though it is different, yet they still trace interconnections between themselves and nature. These women offer empirical support for the notion that a mutual self underlies a theory of difference that is nonhierarchical and nondominating (Gaard 1993; Gruen 1993).

Living the Ecological Life

If the needs of nature and humans are in conflict, these different needs must be balanced. Therefore, the women regularly question how they balance these needs. To remain true to their ecological selves, their lives consist of an ongoing series of critical moments in which the needs of humans and nature are negotiated. Nevertheless, their persistent questioning is not aimed at finding "the solution." They understand that human life, of necessity, negatively affects nature. They use the available information at hand and strike the best possible balance. They dwell on weighty environmental issues, regret the inadequate balances, and savor the clever trade-offs. Unlike the traditional environmentally conscious consumer who seeks to shop differently, these women seek to live differently. This vision is fueled by their profound skepticism of business and marketing practices.

Cynicism of Business and Marketing

All the women distrust business and marketing practices and could be labeled "marketing heretics" (Ritson and Dobscha 1998). The intensity of the distrust ranges from skepticism to hatred. Ann calls advertising an "evil in our society." Cathy explicitly states her cynicism:

> In particular the plastic companies have been, in my opinion, ... very abusive of the public trust. They have been offering a lot of half information and half truths. *And again that is why I always try to instill in people [the need to] question.* Especially when it comes out really smooth and slick and if they have an 800 number for free, why are they doing that? If they are doing that, there is only one thing, I hate to sound cynical, but there is only one thing that motivates any industry—the bottom line. (emphasis added)

Environmental products and claims are particularly scrutinized. Laura is bothered by the improper use of the "green" product symbol. She states, "It just bugs me that people are using, using the guise of being environmentally friendly when it really hasn't changed anything." Dana similarly questions the environmental claims of companies:

> Because a lot of companies try to make themselves out to be these green companies when they are not. Diapers, biodegradable diapers was a big one. And what were some others? Yeah, like aseptic packaging advertising. You know, recycling advertising that you are seeing now. Like those little juice boxes and how they are going to be recyclable. It's coming soon to your locality. That's a crock of bull!

Occasionally, the women take joy in the marketplace when buying something secondhand at a garage sale or finding a product that meets their strict criteria: "Well, what I use in the laundry room is Sears detergent.... It doesn't have dyes, perfumes, and it doesn't have bleach" (Robin).

Marketplace decisions may appear to be these women's chief concerns, but these decisions are merely a few of myriads of daily trade-offs. Decisions about whether to drive, walk, or take public transportation may be low involvement for most people, but these women consider the environmental impact of these choices. Cathy relates her dilemma this way: "In fact, I hate driving. I would like to have no car if I could, but I find it inconvenient in this country. And that's what bothers me too. I don't know why more people don't walk." Similarly, Robin complains about the trade-off between country living that brings her closer to nature and the related transportation problems:

> And also deciding to live out here was a difficult [decision] environmentally because of course we use our cars a lot more. My car is, I drive a lot and I like to drive and we drive when we travel. And our car is the worst that we do to the environment. For one thing we buy it. God knows, what happened to the environment while our car was manufactured, probably a lot. And then, I drive into town three or four times a day. When I lived in town there would be a lot of times where I would choose to walk. And when I did [drive], I wouldn't have to drive as far.

Helen handles the issue of driving by bundling as many errands as possible into one trip. Rachel discusses the balance she strikes between her needs and nature's:

> We have shitty [old and scratched] cars.... [Cars] are really not a good idea because I think people should be, we should have a way of protesting; that is, just buy used cars and hardly drive. Drive as little as possible. And make the cars last as long as possible. And not spend a lot of money on them. We try to spend the least amount of money on cars. We change the oil ourselves and as much of the repairs we do ourselves. I do, actually, most of the work on the cars. I took some auto mechanic classes when I was younger.

Thus, Rachel seeks to use cars that already exist, ignores the surface patina, maintains the car herself, and uses the car infrequently. All the women complain that driving is an activity in which a good balance is difficult to achieve. Many of the women blame society (e.g., government not being dedicated to public transportation), but others blame their own laziness or reliance on this mode of transportation. The women's views stand in stark contrast to the dominant social meanings of the car as sign of freedom and control (Kunstler 1996).

Cleaning is another domain of questioning. The women with children are concerned about environmental contaminants that might come in contact with their children or otherwise compromise their immature systems. Robin and Dana describe the dilemma:

> If I'm toilet training, this always happens when I'm toilet training a child, you don't want to sit their bottom on a toilet seat that's just been cleaned with Lysol. (Robin)

> Well, you've got little kids around. And you start thinking about those fumes. You know, when you have all these warnings on there about the ventilation needed. You're in the bathroom with no window. You start to, there are health concerns there too. I think that is why women are much more connected to it that way. Well, I think women are more connected to the environment in general than men are. (Dana)

As the primary caregivers, the women question the risk that household products introduce into the household. Social norms are consistently violated as the women challenge the dominant notions of cleanliness and housekeeping.

Dismantling the Consumer

Our informants make consumption less central by shifting their household consumption patterns. They do without many of the conveniences that average consumers take for granted. For example, Robin avoids all flea and tick products for her animals. Rachel, Laura, Cathy, Margaret, and Helen do not use chemical pesticides or fertilizers for their lawns. Laura and Rachel never eat at restaurants where the leftovers are packaged in Styrofoam. Dana and Terry never buy prepackaged vegetables that are covered in nonrecyclable shrink-wrap. The women eschew products like dryer sheets and do not use a dryer in the warmer months. They also avoid many paper products (e.g., cups, plates, towels, napkins). Although the average consumer may engage in some of these activities, these women were perhaps more consistent and intense in their avoidance.

Although some of the refusals create hardship, our informants also believe that goods such as panty hose, junk food (e.g., Cheez Whiz), garbage disposals, and paper products are useless and easily forgone: "I always hear about these new gadgets like ... voice-activated phone cards and stuff that I don't really see. Stuff like that I don't really understand why is that so great?" (Terry). Similarly, Laura states, "Why do we buy so many things in our society that we just don't really need?" When the women cannot do without a product, they simply use less:

> For instance, if I bought a can of environmentally friendly cleanser that cleans sinks and tubs, I mean I would use a can a year. I clean the kitchen sink every day but you just need a tiny sprinkle. It literally lasts me a year, same with dish detergent. Um, I probably buy a 22 ounce bottle of dish detergent a year, maybe two a year. And I'll watch other people wash their dishes and I'll bet you they buy one every two weeks. (Laura)

Another reasonable alternative to avoidance is to buy secondhand goods, as Terry states: "All the clothes I buy, I buy at the thrift store. Partly because I am a cheapskate and partially because the clothes already exist and they are perfectly good stuff. I don't need to buy new ones, which make a demand for more to be made." Helen creates collage light switch covers from pictures in magazines and newspapers and constructs clothing out of unused clothing: "Then I decided I would use the ties, like this is a tie, that's a tie, and then I had some kerchiefs that I liked that I never use anymore. So I decided I would use them.... So that's a recycled coat that's getting a recycled lining."

The needs of the earth place limits on the women. They avoid certain products, use products sparingly, and purchase goods secondhand if possible. In Peñaloza and Price's (1993) framework of resistance, radical acts involve altering product meaning, but the women here are more radical in their desire to avoid and limit marketplace solutions. These

acts are part of a larger pattern of living. For these women, living the ecological life means that nature plays a force in the way they define themselves and their relations to others.

The Ecological Life as a Force of Change

Changing One's Self

In the marketplace, merchants facilitate consumption: convenient retail locations and hours; one-stop shopping; layaway plans; easy credit terms; shopping by mail, television, or computer; and so forth. For those seeking to build an environmentally sensitive life, less scaffolding exists. Therefore, living the ecological life requires many acts of creating, building, and foraging. Terry chronicles her own transformation process:

> I remember television shows that I watched when I was a kid that stuck with me. That had an effect, like Swiss Family Robinson type shows where they dealt with what they needed. Normally, naturally. They needed a wash basin. Well, there is a giant seashell down by the shore to bring it up and set it up. They needed to move water. Well there was a spring uphill. They got bamboo pipes and they fit them together and ran it down. And that attracted me.... So, mechanization, technology that did not rely on flipping a switch and things that did encourage ingenuity and creativity simply always attracted me.

The women become inventors. For example, Terry created her own grain grinder from discarded pieces of machinery and parts she purchased secondhand (thus not contributing to overall increases in production):

> This is one of my mad scientist projects. [For these projects] my mind is occupied most of the time and every once in a while my body gets to be occupied. It's an exercise bike that I got at the Thrift Store. Couldn't beat the price. Right now the wheel is mounted to a grain grinder so that you can sit comfortably and pedal and with two pulley belts it will transfer what you are pedaling up to the wheel on the grain grinder so you can be pouring the grain in and it will be grinding it into flour and it will be very easy as opposed to doing it by hand which is quite tedious.

Terry solved her grain-grinding problem and makes homemade bread with the flour (again avoiding the purchase of processed bread). Living the ecological life means that the women develop their creativity and ingenuity when viable alternatives to their problems do not exist.

Rachel's inventiveness is demonstrated in her knack for foraging. Foraging is a way of life for people living on the economic fringes of a wealthy, postindustrial society (Hill and Stamey 1990). However, Rachel and her husband do not forage for survival; they forage to sustain themselves without contributing to a consumerist society. Foraging combines the wily and scrappy craftiness of a thief with the originality of an inventor (Ritson and Dobscha 2001). Here, Rachel describes why she engages in "dumpster diving":

> We are kind of like scavengers; that's one way of putting it. That's one thing you can do in this country. Because this is such a fat country, there is so much that you can live off the pickings that [are] left over. So that is one thing that we do.

A good instance of Rachel's ingenuity is found on her organic farm. She and her husband constructed a passive solar greenhouse using only materials found in people's garbage. The door to the greenhouse is from a bathroom shower, and the wood is refuse from people's home improvement projects. Two-liter soda bottles that they found in recycling bins around town contain water that heats the greenhouse.

Ann uses dog food bags for garbage bags and Cathy uses jars for glasses. Rachel and her husband make their own beer, wine, and soap. Robin and Dana use trash as raw materials for their children's school and art projects:

> Well, milk jugs we reuse a lot; we use them for watering cans or storage cans. Projects, like, [my son] built a tornado.... We probably don't end up throwing away any of our milk jugs until they are pretty dilapidated. (Robin)

> And [my daughter's] pencil holder, she made with an old soup can. Construction paper around it, looks like an elephant.... She'll do things like that all the time. Beer bottles with, like a western guy uniform on there or something. She's really good at reusing stuff. She doesn't like to throw anything away. (Cathy)

Many of the women precycle; that is, they only buy goods in packages that can be recycled efficiently. One of the women joined a group in order to buy in bulk. Although many people reuse products, the intensity with which the women reuse products bears note. Laura says, "I use aluminum foil so many times that I don't feel too guilty about that and then recycle it when it's totally falling apart. I had the same roll of aluminum foil for about ten years." Similarly, Helen states, "When I buy plastic bags, we wash them and reuse them. Don't just throw them out, which I used to do." She also used to buy pads of paper for notes and lists; now she uses old papers that were to be recycled. Cathy reuses envelopes by scratching out the old address and putting in new ones.

Although research exists on creativity in solving consumption-related problems (Hirschman 1980), the findings here are consistent with Schau's (2000) suggestion that consumer imagination is the transformation of goods into consumer identities. In this case, however, perhaps greater manipulation, effort, and originality are needed to take refuse and transform it into an object that affirms an ecological, conserver identity. The women invent new solutions and ways of consuming and disposing to affirm their deep connection to nature. The domain of consumer creativity needs to be expanded to include these inventions that occur throughout the exchange process.

Changing Feminine Consumption

Women are bombarded with advertisements describing the essentiality of products to their well-being. From deodorant to clothing, women are told that products can and do enhance the way they are regarded as women. In light of their relationship with nature, the women in the study have rethought their feminine consumption.

Instead of accepting the convenient, yet wasteful, feminine hygiene products (i.e., tampons and pads), Rachel employs reusable cloths for her menstruation:

> Why do we need that so much when what we really need is a way to conserve, to take care of our planet? That seems to me to be most important and it's hard for me to understand why it isn't to other people. It doesn't seem to be. People want to have convenience; they don't want to have to deal with their messes.

> They just want it all to [go away], a good example for me is that, I don't know if this is going to gross you out or not, but feminine hygiene products like disposable feminine napkins and tampons and all that—I don't use those. I use cloths and I wash them out. I have been doing that for a long time and it's not a big deal to me anymore. I just don't even think twice about it. So I go to the store and I look in the aisle full of all that shit, wrapped in plastic and it really kind of freaks me out that this is what everybody is using and its all just going into the landfill.

Rachel views human disconnection from the planet's health as synchronous with the disconnection people have from their own personal waste—whether bodily or household.

The women in this study also question feminine consumption in the area of housekeeping. Despite changing roles, housework is still generally viewed as women's work (DeVault 1991). The goal of housework is to present a public masterpiece of efficiency and cleanliness (Cowan 1987; DeVault 1987). This work of "keeping house" traditionally requires the use of chemical solutions to maintain the level of cleanliness instilled in most women by their mothers. Cleaning often involves covering up nature as manifested by dirt, odors, bugs, and the like (Gruen 1993).

Many of the women in this study substitute more benign alternatives (e.g., baking soda, vinegar) for harsh and toxic cleansers. Others, in a more radical move, challenge traditional norms of cleanliness. Robin questions ideas regarding cleanliness when she uses no pesticides: "We put up with a lot of spiders and ants." The women who were concerned about water issues chose to shower less regularly. Laura states, "Some people think they have to wash their sheets every week. Heck, we're fairly clean when we get in them.... Or my towels, I dry myself when I've just taken a shower. Why would I have to wash my towel?" Robin labels this as a new norm of "letting things go." She states, "Like I'll use toilet bowl cleaner not regularly, but when things start to grow." Cathy says:

> I'll let things go. I haven't cleaned my toilet all the time. I'll let it go. I have well water here and I have iron bacteria, so I get this orange fill. And it is completely harmless and it doesn't smell. I mean there is absolutely no, you know, it's not bad. So I'll let that go until I can't stand it, and then I squirt some of that stuff on it and clean it, but rather than every time, cause every time you clean it you have to flush it, which is wasting a couple of gallons of water. So, I just don't do it. And I think, well, if somebody is bothered by my orange toilet bowl, well, that's too bad.

Robin and Cathy acknowledge that this norm collides with traditional norms, which is apparent from the social disapproval they receive from their mothers. Both Cathy and Robin's mothers are traditional housekeepers with myriad chemicals in their arsenals. Here, Robin discusses her gradual shift away from her mother's style of cleaning:

> Cleaning bathrooms and bathtubs concerned me right away that I was, I used the same chemicals basically that my mother did, and it concerned me that I was gonna be bathing my child in the bathtub that had just been cleaned with Clorox or Lysol or something like that. So I tended to not clean very much, like for a long time I just used Windex because it was easy and pretty inexpensive and it seemed to clean just about everything.

Terry argues that manufacturers should be proactive in eliminating chemicals from household cleansers, thus creating safer homes and a better environment. Terry discusses the contradictions of bringing in hazardous materials to clean the home:

> Wait a minute, household hazardous waste, it's in the grocery store. It comes into the town in a semi truck. Huge, big semi truck. Tons of stuff. And it's not a problem. It's there, on the shelf, on the backside of the baby food aisle. And I can go in there and I can buy it. I can put it on the same little conveyor things that goes across the little thing to the little laser scanners so that it can tell the people what it is and keep their inventory straight. And I can bring it home, but the minute I open it up and start using some of it, if I want to throw some of it away, it's now household hazardous waste.

Another traditional area of women's work is gift giving (Fischer and Arnould 1990; Sherry 1983). All the women stated that they reuse wrapping paper, even if it means being teased by their friends and coworkers. Helen states, "But it just seems like such a waste because some of it doesn't get wrinkled, soiled or whatever. You can press it." Likewise, Dana reuses wrapping paper: "We save things like wrapping paper and bags and ribbons and all that wrapping sort of stuff.... We reuse a lot of stuff like that." This activity enables the women to engage in gift giving while not creating unnecessary waste. In addition, the women have rethought the gifts they exchange. Dana used her gift as a socializing force (Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993) when she gave her in-laws recycled note pads as stocking stuffers. These actions often evoke teasing from family and friends: "People used to laugh at me. In fact, one Christmas I got a big box..., and it was everyone's paper sacks ... because I always fold up my bag and take it back and use it again" (Helen). The women's tenacity in the face of this social disapproval is additional evidence of the strength of their connection with nature.

Changing the Community

A moderately high level of mainstream environmentalism characterizes the women's local community, but the women seek to extend these ideas. The most direct form of education and socialization occurs within the family. Margaret suggests that if you cultivate sensitivity to the natural world in children, "they are more likely to [protect the earth] when they grow up and are running their own households." Cathy's children did exactly what Margaret suggested: "Now my son is a biologist, and he is going to be teaching biology. So I passed it on. My daughter also just loves animals, nature. So I think that's an accomplishment to me because I see so many kids who are unaware and careless and I'm glad mine aren't." This socialization primarily took the form of fostering a deep love for nature in their children.

In addition to socializing their own families, the women also work for change in their local schools. Some of the women volunteer at the schools to present more alternatives to recycling and a different view of nature. The women also engage in formal and informal adult education. Informal strategies involve teaching by example: "People say, 'Why are you doing that?' and then you can explain..., and that does have tremendous material consequences" (Cathy). Formal strategies involve teaching structured classes. In stark contrast to the traditional approach that more information will translate into action (Cornwell and Schwepker 1995;

Pickett, Kangun, and Grove 1993), the women try to develop people's connections to nature in hopes that this approach will inspire change.

Another way the women work to improve their communities is by creating ecological spaces. Workspaces, for example, raise problems for the women. For example, Laura implemented a program in which employees use both sides of the paper in printing drafts. Rachel instituted a composting plan at the restaurant where she works and uses the waste to enrich her farmland.

The work of building ecological spaces began at home and continued into the workplace, but it did not end there. The most challenging task involved preserving public ecological spaces. In the eyes of the women, the ecological spaces over which they have least control—public land, national parks, and government-owned land—are rapidly deteriorating or disappearing. Helen describes the problem:

> I mean, people are finding that they want to go out and be in the, among trees and without a lot of other people around, without houses and everything. And they find there are so few places to go that these places are getting crowded. Like the national parks. Where are you going to go to be alone ... just be in awe of the beauty of the world, etc.? And there are getting to be fewer and fewer places like that, and I think people are getting upset about that.

Dana speaks of the loss of ecological space at the hands of human-made catastrophes: "Just thinking about the oil spill. I think that was really upsetting. Feel a loss of the animals and their habitat.... It's carelessness, stupid mistakes that can have huge impacts. And create huge losses."

The women's community action extends into protecting the environmental health of public spaces. Robin and her family and Laura are actively involved in stream watching—adopting and caring for a stretch of stream. And the women's concept of community extends to include the national and global environmental problems:

> We believe very strongly that there are two very important issues, most important issues today, and one of them is the environment and the other one is overpopulation. Because we feel that the overpopulation is affecting the environment negatively and, of course, if the environment goes, then not only do we go, but all, you know, the other species that depend on that particular environment will be affected also. (Helen)

An Interpretation

The conceptualization of self that underlies the relationship between these women and nature is the mutual self; this self-in-relation-to-nature is powerful and encompassing. The data indicate that this mutual self leads to nondominating paths and fosters a life of respect and constraint toward the natural world. In what Benjamin (1988) calls the "dance of interaction," the "other" places constraints on the mutual self. For example, a parent seeks to have a child thrive both for the parent's sake and for the child's sake. In much the same way, the women seek to constrain themselves so that both they and the earth can flourish. The women live this ecological life, which includes questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie their daily decisions. Specifically, living the ecological life means making consumption a less central component of life. However, this constrained consumption is rarely a hardship and is often the source of satisfaction and liberation.

The women enter the marketplace when they find both problems and opportunities. Marketplace perils include questionable marketing tactics and wasteful practices, but satisfaction is found in buying local organic products at a roadside stand; purchasing things secondhand; or finding a product that fits their strict criteria for acquisition, use, and disposal. Still, these women experience more frustration within the marketplace than within nature.

Implications for Relevant Stakeholders

Implications for Marketing Managers

A challenge facing marketing managers is whether this consumer frustration can be translated into empowering acts. It may be in companies' enlightened self-interest to respond (Murray and Ozanne 1991). An ecologically friendly marketplace would include pricing that estimates the environmental costs, less packaging and the use of more recyclable materials, advertising that has environmentally accurate information, and bulk purchasing to reduce packaging. More radical forms of eco-markets would encourage less consumption, local products and markets, and systems of barter (e.g., Local Exchange Trading Systems, the Ecovillage) (see Gabriel and Lang 1995).

For marketers that pursue this unique yet growing segment, establishing trust is a considerable obstacle. As Ottman (1997, p. 183, emphasis in original) states, "The backlash to marketers' questionable green-marketing activities of the early 1990's taught us a valuable lesson: consumers' environmental concerns cannot be exploited by merely communicating superficial product tweaks and regulatory-driven corporate responses.... [I]t's not enough to talk green; companies must *be* green." A genuine greening of internal operations and corporate culture requires employee participation; reassessment and improvement of manufacturing processes; and a revision of marketing practices such as labeling, packaging, and product developments that reflect environmental values.

One way to construct trust with consumers is for companies to engage in environmental audits. Many companies, such as Texaco and Xerox, already conduct external environmental auditing and provide detailed reports of the findings to their relevant stakeholders. These audits "assess current performance and set benchmarks upon which to measure progress" (Ottman 1997, p. 184). Similarly, the demand for third-party green certification of wood products is growing. This guarantee that wood is grown and harvested in sustainable ways offers a strategic tool in the marketplace. It is estimated that between 16 and 25 million people would purchase certified wood products and are willing to pay a price premium (Ozanne and Smith 1998; Ozanne and Vlosky 1997).

Establishing consumer relationships based on trust has long-term benefits (Ganesan 1994). For example, the Body Shop weathered a public relations storm when some of its environmental claims were attacked. Although stock prices dipped, the clientele remained loyal to the company because a trusting relationship had been established (Sillanpaa 1998). Two other companies pursuing a successful ecologi-

cal approach are Tom's of Maine and Patagonia. Tom's of Maine's mission is to treat all humans, animals, and nature with respect and dignity. To achieve this goal, it seeks quality employee relations, donates profits to ecologically based charities, creates products using the most benign ingredients and processes, and expresses its ethos in all its marketing communication (Briskin and Peppers 2001). Similarly, Patagonia donates money to conservation groups, reduces waste and harmful chemicals in its manufacturing processes, uses recycled materials and organically grown cotton, reduces suppliers' waste, and has a no-growth strategy (Reinhardt 1998; www.patagonia.com). All three of these companies offer products and operational practices that are consistent with the values of consumers, such as the women in this study, who view themselves as conservers.

Implications for Environmental Groups

If marketing practitioners must struggle to build trust within customer relationships, environmental groups stand in a unique position relative to the consumer–manufacturing dyad. Research suggests that consumers are most likely to trust environmental groups as a source of information on environmental certification over independent third-party groups or the government (Ozanne and Vlosky 1997). Therefore, environmental groups might develop environmental seals of approval that consumers could use to simplify their decision-making strategies.

This study also provides evidence for rethinking the way environmental groups go about enacting their goals. Although consumer education plays an important role in fostering social change, the message may need to be expanded. Data on the alarming rates of deforestation, greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, or species extinction may not be the most effective message for translating public environmental concern into action. Our results suggest that working to build multifaceted relationships among people and nature may foster the development of a mutual self that can constrain consumption and increase environmentally responsible behaviors. Instead of focusing on increasing recycling and other behaviors, a more effective strategy for change may be to amplify the importance of nature in people's lives through direct and local contact. Therefore, environmental policy programs should stress hands-on interventions (e.g., bringing urban children to rural areas, watching and counting whales, erecting bluebird trails, monitoring streams) that illuminate ecological diversity and the interconnectedness of all things on earth. Programs that foster the mutual self may have a rippling effect into other facets of consumers' everyday lives, including acquisition, use, and disposal of consumer goods.

This self-in-relation-to-nature may already exist for many groups in society. For example, the river guides in Arnould and Price's (1993) study exhibit the mutual self and tried to foster this relationship with nature among the participants. Thus, the task before environmental groups may be to identify people who already possess this relationship to nature, work toward the goal of raising consciousness about this relationship, and then use this relationship to motivate moderation in consumption. Recreational activities as wide-ranging as hiking, boating, golfing, gardening, and biking all have varying degrees of contact with nature. These preexisting relationships to nature might be amplified through local demonstrations that enable people to experience nature differently. Consider the impact of transforming a section of a golf course with native plantings. From an economic standpoint, cost savings might be realized in terms of labor, water, pesticides, and fertilizers. However, environmental benefits may also be reaped, as native fauna inhabit these nontraditional golfing spaces. In contrast to sterile monoculture greens, native habitats would have greater color, movement (e.g., butterflies), and form. The results here suggest that the firsthand experience of natural diversity might affect people's behavior. Ideally, golfers might apply these firsthand insights to landscaping their own homes and businesses.

Similarly, our findings suggest that teaching children at a young age about the environment fosters stronger commitment to the environment in adult life. Environmental groups might form partnerships with local schools and create community gardens in local schoolyards so that children grow up in daily contact with nature, knowing firsthand the joy of a diverse habitat.

Implications for Regulatory Agencies

The women in this study experience government regulation of nature very differently than the average consumer. For example, many of the informants believed that the government's preservation strategies lacked vision and scope. The national parks system, though providing a "natural" haven for many tourists during the vacation months, stands as an example of our culture's disconnection with the natural that exists within everyday life. Long lines to get into the parks, massive overcrowding of campsites, and excessive amounts of waste are common occurrences in these destinations that are specifically constructed and designed for experiencing the "great outdoors."

Government regulators should look more carefully at how they package and promote nature. For many people, nature becomes a destination rather than something that exists in their everyday lives. People's disconnection from the local environs that surround their houses, towns, and adjacent communities has important ramifications. If local environs are perceived as less exotic and majestic, they may also be perceived as less worthy of conservation efforts. Fostering connections to local environmental wonders may deepen citizens' commitment to preserving those areas that most affect their everyday quality of life.

Furthermore, regulators must consider the weaknesses in the current environmental guidelines. The Federal Trade Commission guidelines of 1996 (cited in Ottman 1997, pp. 215–38) provide a good starting point, but they are largely overlooked by organizations. Moreover, these guidelines have shifted a disproportionate amount of the responsibility to consumers by providing waste disposal guidelines while often ignoring the wasteful manufacturing processes that contribute to environmental degradation. These guidelines are useful for consumers who want to make minor changes in their consumption patterns in order to shop their conscience. However, they provide little relief for the consumers who, like the women in this study, seek to become conservers. Furthermore, although these guidelines relieve the burden consumers feel when shopping for household

goods, they also reinforce the "consume differently" discourse that contributes to the maintenance of the high levels of consumption that are unique to North America yet are devastating globally. More public discourse on consuming less and on alternatives to consumption needs to be encouraged (Ozanne and Murray 1995).

For example, many plastic containers that are nationally marketed have "recycle" symbols. However, collection sites are not always available to customers who buy these containers. Therefore, to avoid deception, regulators have recommended that the statement "Check to see if recycling facilities exist in your area" be included on the bottle's packaging (Ottman 1997). This recommendation lays a major onus of responsibility on the consumer, who must first actively separate this bottle from others in the recycling bin, check with the local environmental regulation agency to determine whether such a facility exists, and then throw the bottle away when no such facilities exist. Regulators need to shift more responsibility to manufacturers not just to label their products properly but also to produce products that are easily recyclable within a majority of markets.

Implications for Consumers

The mutual self is the basis for an empowering way of life in which people question the role of consumption in their lives, dismantle unnecessary consumption, and become conservers. The notion of citizen as conserver provides a potentially powerful metaphor that links the ecological self to the marketplace (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Zaltman, LeMasters, and Heffring 1982). This citizen-as-conserver metaphor highlights an oppositional meaning to the concept of consumer, which is a foundational concept in the field of marketing.

Contrary to the assumption that consumption in a mass-market economy leads to a better quality of life, the women in this study have found freedom in conserving. By enacting the mutual self, they feel a greater sense of control and power, because they are neither dominating nor being dominated. The women have transformed themselves and the communities around them, even if the steps they take are small—cleaning a stretch of stream, providing a child with an alternative viewpoint, or becoming critically reflexive in the household choices they make.

These women view consuming as a regrettable activity and only enter the marketplace reluctantly. Questions remain: Are these women part of a growing trend, or are they a marginal group? In the best-selling book, *Your Money or Your Life* (Dominguez and Robin 1992), the excessive focus on money and consumption is cited as a primary cause of the marketplace dependency in the United States and people's loss of control over their lives. In the voluntary simplicity movement that is spreading from its origins in the Pacific Northwest (Andrews 1997), the message offered is that if people discard unnecessary material clutter from their lives, they will live more "inwardly rich" lives (Elgin 1993, p. 25). Finally, Schor (1998) identifies the growing number of downshifters, upscale and educated adults who have decided to downshift from the fast-paced life of corporate America to less stressful jobs and schedules. Although downshifters do not reject consumption out of hand, they consume differently in order to live within more modest means. They choose less demanding and economically rewarding jobs, so they have more free time to pursue family, creative, and natural activities. Schor estimates that downshifters represent approximately 15% of the U.S. population.

Thus, growing numbers of U.S. citizens are already changing their "consuming" lifestyles to gain control over their chaotic lives. Gabriel and Lang (1995, p. 151) suggest that this act may ultimately be the most radical form of protest: "Yet, it is these largely invisible rebels who may in the long run provide the greater, if not the only challenge to consumerism. By saying 'No,' they may force a questioning of the core assumptions of consumerism and open up a range of choices that are currently invisible." The women in this study find that consuming less makes them feel greater control over their homes and their families and enables them to affirm the values they hold dear. Although this empowerment occasionally brings hardships, complications, and socially deviant behaviors, the women find satisfaction in enacting and maintaining their deep connections to nature.

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